

# RIOT 99

Riot 99 play great anthemic '77 style punk and oi. They have a self-released EP called Destroy the City. The Faux British accent of lead singer Drew leaps immediately out at you, but then you realize he is not faking it. He is Australian and used to sing in Compound Fracture, as well as another band from Sydney called Stanley Knife. Taras, the drummer, is originally from Edmonton and played in the Glory Stompers and the Systematics and ran a street punk label called Disturbance Records. Their new guitar player, Andy, plays in a local chaos punk band called the Class. And Jim is from the garage scene and now plays bass in the band. They joined us live at our radio show, Equalizing-X-Distort, on March 3rd to catch us up on recent developments. Interview by Stephe Perry.

**MRR: Can you tell us what bands you have been in prior to Riot 99, or that you're currently in?**

Drew: In Australia, I was in a band called Compound Fracture, Com Frac, for short. It was like a straight out oi band. And then Stanley Knife. And now Riot 99 here in Canada.

Jim: I played with Kim Mitchell from about '81-'86 and then joined April Wine from about '87 till '92, and from '92 on I have been working with various acts—Peabo Bryson, Ambrosia—they are sort of a prog rock side fusion thing I am doing and then I just recently joined Riot 99 (lots of laughter).

Drew: And he was the band bike for Lynryd Skynyrd.

Taras: I was in the Glory Stompers in Edmonton and before that it was RCMP (Rednecks Cause My Problems) and after the Glory Stompers was the Systematics, also in Edmonton, and then here in Toronto I was in the Blatherskites. And now Riot 99.

Andy: I am currently playing in the notorious punk rock outfit The Class. Taras, Jim, and Drew: Notorious! (All together with lots of laughter).

**MRR: How did Riot 99 form? Who met who? Who got brought in and at what times?**

Drew: I met Taras in the men-only Sauna on Bathurst Street. No, actually I came over here in '98 and I wanted to start up a band. I thought up the name and I knew Taras from a compilation that both our bands

were on (*Oi it's Streetpunk Vol 2.—Helen of Oi!*) and from the address on the CD I found out he lived around the corner from me in Kensington Market. We got together and tried to find other members. It took us a year before we got Howard and Nathalie on bass and guitar, and then they quit and we got these two wankers here to fill in and the rest, you know.

**MRR: What was the initial idea behind starting Riot 99 in terms of the kind of band you wanted to start?**

Jim: Well, we were really interested in beginning a neo-fascist hate rock outfit, but unfortunately that music just isn't quite popular with the kids these days, so we decided to go into the funk and it's taken us where we are now. (laughter)

Drew: I just wanted to do a straight-out street punk oi band. No bullshit, no mess, no fuss, just pure impact.

Andy: So you can see that there is a little conflict between James and Drew here. They kind of have artistic preferences clashing.

Drew: You mean differences... There's a lot of inner artistic pain, it keeps me up at night.

Jim: Pure rock 'n' roll.

Drew: Maximum rock 'n' roll

Taras: I wanted to start a metal band, but Drew convinced me to start this band.

Drew: Ah fuck. You and your goddamned metal.

**MRR: How has the band changed with the new line-up?**

Jim: Well we are so much more fuckin' better. More better ya know?

Andy: I think musically we are a little harder. In terms of the old songs I do try and mimic Howard's guitar parts because those songs are already set in stone. As for the new songs, I think it is a little bit more of a harder sound. James is pure rock 'n' roll, so...

Drew: ...that guy is pure cock 'n' balls.

Andy: ...but yeah, I add a little harder drive to it. I am not particularly influenced by the Clash like Howard was. I pale in comparison to his guitar playing, but hopefully the sound is...

Jim: Don't be modest, you are much better than he is...

Andy: Yeah okay, Ter? (laughter)

Taras: You are a damn fine guitar player.

Drew: Yeah, he is just being modest—the cunt is a virtuoso.

Andy: I'm not putting myself down, I know I rock. Drew: He is fuckin' ace.

**MRR: Where did the name Riot 99 come from, and does the name have a story or any significance to it?**

Drew: I got the idea from a song by the Violators called "Summer of '81," which is one of my favorite

songs, and in the chorus they go "Riot, Riot..." and say the name of a city and it just sounds great. It was 1999 and I just thought Riot 99 sounds like a damn good name.

Taras: Yeah, it was like in 1999 there was that whole thing where everyone was going crazy about the world ending, the apocalypse and all that, and they predicted mass riots everywhere in all the major cities, like in New York and stuff and that's kind of where the name came from.

Drew: And I went down to New York for New Year's Eve 1999 hoping there'd be a fuckin' riot but I missed out and it depressed the hell out of me.

Taras: Everyone was holding hands and singing songs (laughing).

Drew: It was fucked. There was a ripple around 11:30 pm in Times Square and one or two minor incidents but that was it.

Jim: Plus the name El DeBarge was already taken.

**MRR: Who do you consider influences for the Riot 99 sound?**

Taras: We all have different personal influences.

**MRR: Sure but what contributes to the band's sound?**

Drew: Blitz, Violators, GBH, Last Resort, Infa Riot...

Taras: It would be all early oi stuff like No Future releases and '77 punk stuff like the Clash.

Jim: Stiff Little Fingers.

Taras: The Jam, the Boys, the Damned, Menace, Slaughter & The Dogs, Cock Sparrer, New York Dolls, the Dead Boys, Sham 69, old Skrewdriver—pre-racial crap—is great rock 'n' roll. Just a mix of late 70s punk and early 80s oi, mostly. But we're all into AC/DC and Rose Tattoo and stuff like that too, and the Saints, so basically we're like an Australian punk rock 'n' roll band, ha, ha.

Drew: British.

Taras: We're a rock 'n' roll influenced punk band, not we're a punk influenced rock 'n' roll band!

Andy: I think it definitely does lean towards the '77 stuff a little bit more.

Drew: UK '82. No American influences whatsoever. Jim: ...except for the Ramones, obviously.

Drew: I don't have that many American influences.

Taras: Motley Crue. (laughing)

Andy: That's the shame of the band.

Taras: Nobody else likes 80s metal except for me. (laughing)

Jim: Hey!

Taras: OK, James likes it too. James is my metal buddy (laughing).

Drew: They are the epitome of shit, I can't believe you like those LA fuckwits.

**MRR: On the note of outside influences, both Taras and Drew grew up in scenes outside of Toronto. Can you tell me about those scenes and how growing up in Australia or Edmonton, how that might have impacted on things that come out in Riot 99? the reason I ask is because I don't think there was much of a '77 punk scene here.**

Taras: I think we definitely had a different view of things than people here. I think it has a lot to do with being from different places. There seems to be more of a strong hardcore scene here in Toronto, but not really a punk scene. But now there is starting to be a punk scene with Andy's band and us playing. There seems to be a lot of kids getting into that kind of stuff.

Drew: The scene in Australia was very heavily influenced by British punk and it's a fuckin' great scene.

Jim: I came out of the rockabilly scene in this city, which grovels to tourists and old age money. It's just totally boring. There is no rock 'n' roll in it whatsoever. This music you can feel the purity of the rock 'n' roll influence in it and that's why I'm here.

Taras: We are just raw rock 'n' roll, basically.

Drew: Raw power.

Andy: I think, well for me personally, I am into the whole studs and leather charged chaos punk...

Drew: Bondage.

Andy: Yup, bondage, all the way, up the bondage...

Drew: Buttplugs, lubricants, strap-ons.

Andy: ...but when it comes to playing in Riot 99, I am heavily influenced by bands like Social Distortion, Stiff Little Fingers all the sort of '77 bands more rock 'n' roll influenced, so I can fuse that. I can play in two different bands and sound completely different and I think that's pretty cool.

Taras: I listen to a lot of different things, but my past influences for my other bands were usually early 80s British stuff and early 80s stuff from the States, like the *Boston not LA* period, or early DC stuff as well as early California stuff like BYO and the Mystic comps. I also listen to reggae and soul and rockabilly and psychobilly and garage trash and marching music and tons of stuff so it all really influences you. I grew up on 50s rock 'n' roll from my dad. Anyway, I guess what I am trying to say here is, in my old bands our influences were much more focused, in this band my personal influences as well as our collective influences are coming from everywhere, and they all come together somehow to create this...even though we may not all totally like what each other likes. Right Drew?

Drew: For me the epitome of punk rock is the early to mid 80s British punk. The nihilistic, self-destruct, Thatcher-era, *No Future* style of punk rock. That is my favorite style of music.

**MRR: I want to move from influences to sound. A slight subtle difference here. Some of the people who will be reading this material won't have had a chance to hear you. Can you describe your sound for us? What would you say to folks who are from the hardcore scene who may not have heard from you or be familiar with you, what you sound like?**

All: Whoooooooooooooooooooooo (one sung note in an atonal voice similar to a test pattern).

**MRR: Unfortunately, that is not going to translate into print, so let's try something else. If someone comes up to you and says, oh you're in a band, what do you sound like, what would you tell them?**

Jim: It would sound like music that you would want to stick it in to. Music that makes you want to fuck.

Taras: ...or fight. (laughing)

Drew: Music that makes you want to fuckin' destroy. When people come to our show we want them to walk out of there like they have been shot in the chest with an adrenaline bullet...and start smashing public property.

Jim: He's got, he's got...Andy's got a pure 50s rock 'n' roll lead guitar style. It's beautiful, it's excellent. I just play a straight ahead bass. Taras is very technically...he is a technical drummer. He plays very tight. And Drew is just shooting from the throat every time. That's sort of the sound we go for.

Andy: I really never met anybody else in any band who really gives there all, aside from Drew. We played twice on Friday night. Drew, he didn't think he could play the second time and he just totalled his throat—his vocal chords—but he kept doing it. Ter, I can honestly can't say that there is a drummer like Ter. He's got one of the most original styles...

Jim: OK, let's stop kissing each other's asses.

Drew: He is solid.

Taras: Next.

**MRR: You released two demos before the EP came out. Can people still get these?**

Drew: Oh no, mate. We sold them ages ago.

Taras: No that's just old stuff, we are moving on.

**MRR: But you are still doing some of these songs live?**

Taras: Oh yeah, we are still doing these songs but we are going to....

Drew: They are going to be on the album, except that song "Guttersnipe." It's fuckin' shit.

**MRR: You are not going to do that one?**

Drew: We haven't done that for a year or two.

**MRR: What has the response been to the EP? Do you still have copies left?**

Taras: Oh, we have tons of copies left. Nobody seems to want to buy vinyl as much as they used to.

**MRR: Do people know about it?**

Taras: Yeah, it's just kind of going slowly.

Drew: We spent so much making the fuckin' thing. It was \$4.00 wholesale, so to actually send it anywhere we have to do it out of our pockets. We are reluctant to ship off large amounts.

Taras: It was a good idea if we were living in the past, because we really wanted to make a good package and make it look good and make it worth buying because if I saw a record like that I would want to buy it instead of the folded over photocopied paper. But I guess people would just rather buy CDs and in hindsight it was a mistake.

Drew: They can jam it up their assholes for all I care (laughter).

**MRR: That was a self release. Are you hoping to release more stuff? You were talking about recording an album.**

Drew: Yeah, we're recording an album.

Taras: As soon as we can get some money, which we don't have. We have plans to go into the studio and record a full length, but we are totally broke and we never get paid for shows and we get ripped off and we get shit on....

Drew: ...but we are used to it in this town.

**MRR: What happened with MuchMusic? You said you did something with MuchMusic recently.**

Jim: We did an interview with MuchMusic on Friday. George Stroumboulopoulos who is...(growing increasingly muffled).

Taras: Hey quit shoving the mic in his mouth.

Drew: Aw, sorry mate (laughing).

**MRR: Has that aired yet?**

Jim: No he is trying to get a punk show together to coincide with the *Loud* show, which is a metal show on MuchMusic in Canada and so...

Taras: It is going to be used as a pilot for that.

Jim: We did an interview and then they recorded our set.

**MRR: If and when you guys do get to record is there other people interested in putting it out or are you going to do it yourself?**

Jim: We have had some interest with some labels in Canada and then also transferring into the States so just basically keeping options open.

Andy: Do you want to elaborate on that?

Taras: We are going to be on a compilation soon on Longshot Records, but beyond that....

Jim: There is a compilation from Australia, as well.

Taras: ...but we are just keeping things open right now until we finally record.

**MRR: Can you tell me about the comp in BC?**

Taras: That was supposed to be a 12" maxi single. So there was going to be three bands from Edmonton and three from here. Actually one of the bands was from Calgary. Anyway, now he is going to expand it to a full length compilation.

**MRR: And will it be an oi comp?**

Taras: No it's not. He is not pegging it into one category. There is going to be all sorts of bands on this. Just good music.

**MRR: What's up with the Australian comp?**

Drew: It's called *We're the Blood 2*, and it's put out by a mate of mine in Sydney who runs a label called Snapshot and there is a bunch of real good Australian bands and Sister Mary Rotten Crotch, which is a great name for a band, they are on it as well.

**MRR: What songs are on it?**

Drew: All the songs we have ever recorded, which is a total of five.

Taras: ... in two years! (laughing)

Drew: Two and a half years.

**MRR: In terms of lyrics, what are some of your song titles?**

Drew: "Destroy the City," "Start a Riot," "Cancer in Society," "New York City Girl," "Rise Above," "I Just Wanna," "Nun Fucker."

**MRR: What are some of the things you take on with your lyrics?**



Drew: Fucking Nuns. Cunnilingus...that's a big one. In "Cancer in Society" it is pretty much what we were talking about before...the early to mid 80s British nihilistic No Future punk, fuck-the-system sorta stuff. Just aggressive self-destruct music. The lyrics are pretty much along those lines.

**MRR: Can each of you tell me about your favourite Riot 99 song from a lyrical standpoint and why it's your favourite?**

Jim: My favourite is "New York City Girl," because it's got good lyrics.

Taras: It's just a good rock 'n' roll song.

Drew: Fuckin' oath mate.

**MRR: What's it about?**

Drew: It's about a girl from New York City. (lots of laughter) Really though, it's mainly about St. Mark's Place and how it's a load of fuckin' pretentious shit infested with phony wankers. It's just mainly about snobby New York fuckwits.

**MRR: Jim, do you want to try? Your nodding your head in agreement.**

Jim: Well I really like "New York City Girl," but just to be different I am going to say "What Are They Fighting For?" I just think that...it is sort of an anti-war song from the narrative of a marine that goes to war. It's just a good song. The lyrics are good, it's sort of an emotional take.

Taras: I think my favourite is "Self Destruct," because it is so raw and it just explodes. I don't know what it sounds like to people outside, but from behind the drums, when I am playing it, what I hear sounds really good. It's vicious...evil! Andy: Of the songs that I know I would say "New York City Girl." I think that is actually our strongest song right now. That and of course "I Just Wanna."

**MRR: Do you know the song "I'm an Upstart" by the Angelic Upstarts? Do you know how that is like the band's informal theme song? Did you write "Start a Riot" to be one of these informal theme songs for Riot 99, or is it just a song encouraging people to take up rebellion?**

Taras: I suppose it could be.

Drew: Well it was our first song. It is just a song about "get pissed, destroy," really. That's what that song's about. It's got no real social content except complete anti-social hooliganism.

**MRR: The thing is that when I heard it...**

Jim: A lot of our songs are sort of anthemic in terms of how they are written. It's great because at shows you have kids that have maybe heard the songs from the last show and the next show they are there and they are singing along to it. It is sort of very similar to Twisted Sister in the 80s with "We're not Gonna Take It."

Drew: Aw Jesus Christ...that's it. Give me the mic, ya fuckin' cunt.

Taras: Yeah alright, now you're talking!

**MRR: Last time you guys were here, Drew got into Australian serial killers.**

Drew: Oh you mean Chopper Reid. Chop Chop. Criminals not serial killers.

**MRR: The only one I know about is Ned Kelly.**

Drew: There is Ned Kelly. There is another bloke called Neddy Smith. Chopper Reid, he's my personal favourite. Good ole Chop Chop.

**How come he's your favourite?**

Drew: Well he got his nickname for...he was an underworld enforcer and he would get criminals, drug dealers, and bank robbers and chop their toes off with bolt cutters until they told him where their stash was and he did that for years. When he was imprisoned he wanted to get into another ward and the warden said "There is no fuckin' way you're going there," so he cut his ears off to get into the infirmary and then he got in that way. He is just a complete nutter, but he is really funny. He has got a real wicked sense of humor, albeit in an ultra-violent kind of way.

Taras: There is a movie about him that came out in Australia, it's really good.

Drew: It's called "Chopper."

Andy: It's actually got a main release now. I just saw it at a local video store.

**MRR: Does this curiosity translate into any of your writing?**

Drew: In my old band we did a song called Neddy Smith because he was such a legend—we used to play in a pub that was his old hang-out, there were still bullet holes in the basement walls from where they would test out their guns. We also did "Harry May" by the Business, but we changed the lyrics to "Chopper Reid." There were a couple of famous Sydney criminals in our songs as a subject. And just here, I was in a taxi a couple of weeks ago and the driver of the taxi is a writer and he gave me a book called the "Big Red Fox" about the most infamous Toronto bank robber in the 30s called Red Ryan and I am reading the book at the moment. It's fuckin' unreal and I am thinking about writing a song about it.

Taras: And we are also going to do a song on that family....

Drew: The Black Donnellys, yeah. That is a great story. We actually got the lyrics from the old Irish folk song about the Donnellys.

**MRR: What are the bands plans for playing out, touring?**

Jim: We are going to do a tour in late June early July with the Wednesday Night Heroes from Edmonton across Canada and a couple of Northern American cities, as well.

Taras: If we can get enough money to get a bus together.

**MRR: How many weeks is that?**

Jim: A couple of weeks.

Andy: Two or three weeks.

Drew: Seven or eight months.

Taras: An extended summer vacation... (laughing)... as in forever!

Andy: We are going to get a tour bus...

Drew: ...and a whole heap of lubricant.

**MRR: What do you hope to accomplish as a band, in general?**

Taras: Everything!... Playing stadiums.

Drew: I just want a pair of fun-fur lederhosen. That's all I want.

Taras: Don't forget the water wings.

Drew: Water wings and pink cowboy boots and a family size tub of vaseline and some shaving razors.

Jim: Just putting out music you can look at ten years from now and people will still want to listen to.

Drew: That's it. That will stand the test of time.

Andy: Ter has this aspiration to rise upon the stage on a drum riser. It's the one thing...

Taras: It's going to be incredible. (laughing)

Drew: I just want to get an album out.

Taras: At this point that would be great. That would just be really good because it has taken us this long to get here and it would be really really good to get an album out.

**MRR: How can people get in touch with Riot 99?**

Taras: We have a website and we also have a PO Box, but I will let Drew talk about the website because he does it.

Drew: It is [www.Riot99.com](http://www.Riot99.com). That's an easy one to remember, isn't it kids.

**MRR: And what's the mailing address?**

Drew: It's in your hot greasy little fist there. Here I'll read it out: Riot 99 c/o Taras O., PO Box 462, 31 Adelaide St. East, Toronto, ON, M5C 2J5 Canada.

